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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [MARR](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: REVIEWING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH DPM DUNG

1. (U) Summary. DPM Dung expressed general satisfaction with US-Vietnam relations, especially regarding trade and investment ties, along with the desire to do more to push the relationship further. He complained about the recent flag cases, catfish, and the US desire for a textile agreement, which he claimed the US negotiator had promised the US would not pursue if Vietnam bought Boeing aircraft. End Summary.

2. (U) Senior Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung requested a meeting with Ambassador March 10 to exchange views on how further to strengthen the bilateral relationship. Septels will cover Iraq, the new Chancery site, and intelligence sharing.

3. (U) Ambassador noted his efforts over the past 15 months to implement the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement, including through a variety of USG-funded programs, in order to help Vietnam better integrate into the international community and prepare itself for eventual accession to the World Trade Organization. He also noted that he has encouraged non-governmental organizations, businesses, universities, and other private entities establish their own links with Vietnam to promote better ties and understanding. He pointed to the success of the recent Asia Society corporate conference, the upcoming opening of the Vietnam exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the appointment of an executive director for the Vietnam Educational Foundation as concrete examples of progress in the latter field.

4. (U) Ambassador cited three areas where much more needs to be accomplished to move our relationship to a more truly normal basis: mil-to-mil ties, law enforcement cooperation, and intelligence sharing, all of which are among the most sensitive aspects in our still new relationship. He noted that the time had come to move our relationship beyond just economic interests and the need by Vietnam for access to the US market in order to look for ways to develop a more comprehensive and strategic relationship.

5. (U) On the military side, the prospect of a visit this year to the U.S. by Defense Minister Tra, ongoing discussions about US Navy ship visits, and greater access granted to our Defense Attache are welcome developments. On a more negative note, we were disappointed with the last minute cancellation of a scheduled meeting with the Vietnamese Defense Ministry's Deputy Chief of General Staff for intelligence with the visiting Defense Intelligence Agency's chief of staff. On the law enforcement side, despite the successful May 2002 conference bringing together a variety of related agencies from both governments, little progress has been made. DEA's contacts and information sharing with the Ministry of Public Security remain very one-sided, demonstrating a continued reluctance by MPS to share information even about narcotics.

6. (U) DPM Dung noted that Vietnam had been "encouraged" with the results of the BTA implementation so far, and underscored the priority Vietnam attaches to trade and investment both in the present and in the long-term. He complimented Ambassador for his personal role in BTA implementation. He stressed that greater cooperation on the BTA was not just important for economic reasons, but also as a way of bringing our two countries and peoples together, improving mutual understanding, and building a long-standing friendship.

7. (U) DPM Dung noted ongoing problems to solve, notably catfish and textiles; resolution would require that both sides really listen to each other's viewpoints. He noted that many Vietnamese felt that recent US decisions on these issues in particular had been "discriminatory" as well as bad for bilateral relations, and had especially been "lacking in goodwill." He urged Ambassador to take personal responsibility for dealing with these issues. On textiles, he claimed that then-Deputy USTR Fisher had "promised" during BTA negotiations that, if Vietnam agreed to buy Boeing aircraft, the US would not pursue a textile agreement. Ambassador indicated surprise at such a claim, but DPM Dung said that Fisher had personally made this commitment to him in the same room in which we were now sitting. Ambassador noted that, in any event, textile agreements were fairly routine, and would have only a short lifespan given the WTO decision to abolish them in 2005

among members. Once Vietnam acceded, it would have full access to this US market. He noted that current uncertainty among US garment buyers could only hurt Vietnam's longer-term interests. He stressed that purchases of Boeing aircraft made good sense in their own right. He cited discriminatory actions on the side of the GVN -- film censorship, restrictions on certain areas of investment.

18. (U) DPM Dung complained also about recent legislation in Virginia and California mandating use of the Republic of Vietnam flag. While saying that he understood that the State Department's ability to stop such legislation was constitutionally limited, he stressed that such decisions have a "harmful" impact on international affairs and bilateral relations, and the State Department would be more active in opposing them. Ambassador noted that the bottom line problem was that the GVN had not been more aggressive in reaching out to the Viet Kieu community in the United States. He urged the GVN to take more steps toward reconciliation, such as sending out SRV Embassy and Congen staff to meet with them, or even inviting former South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky to visit. DPM Dung reacted emotionally, noting that the officials of the former regime in Saigon had been responsible for bringing in 1 million US troops and resulting in the death of 3 million Vietnamese; they are "criminals" and would never be welcomed back. He agreed with Ambassador's comment that, in that case, reconciliation would require "generations."

19. (U) DPM Dung pledged that Vietnam would continue to try to improve cooperation and broaden the relationship, including in areas such as education and training, cultural exchanges, and dealing with the legacy of the war (Agent Orange, landmines, MIAs on both sides). He noted that Defense Minister Tra indeed planned to visit the US, along with other probable visits by the National Assembly Chairman and DPM Vu Khoan. He pointed to more joint efforts on military training. He cited information sharing related to counter-terrorism. He described Vietnam's commitment to combating narcotics, and said that only a few minor obstacles remained related to taxes paid by US staff. (Note: an apparent reference to long-standing negotiations over a Counter-narcotics agreement with State's INL. End note)

10. (U) Ambassador noted that he had yet to meet with General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, the first time in his 32 years as a diplomat that he had not met the most senior political figure in a country. DPM Dung said that GS Manh had agreed to the meeting in principle, that he would personally again forward the request, and that it was only a matter of scheduling at this point.

11. (U) Comment: While sometimes a feisty interlocutor, DPM Dung appeared extremely well-briefed on bilateral ties, as well as sincerely dedicated to further improvement of relations. Ambassador will attempt to seek more regular exchanges such as this one to get over some of our mutual misunderstandings and to clarify Vietnamese attitudes in the interests of promoting stronger and deeper ties.
BURGHARDT